

Corps, Red Lake Band of Ojibwe agree to fish passage on reservation at Lower Red Lake

by Peter Verstegen

The St. Paul District and the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe agreed to work toward construction of a fish passage at the outlet of Lower Red Lake in Clearwater County, northwest of Bemidji, Minn. The project will be constructed on the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe Indian Reservation.

Col. Mike Pfenning, St. Paul District commander, and Floyd Jourdain, Jr., Red Lake tribal chairman, signed a memorandum of understanding March 13. "The MOU provides Bureau of Indian Affairs permission to construct the project on tribal land and was the last document needed prior to finishing the plans and

specifications," said Steve Clark, project manager.

In 1951, the Corps of Engineers modified the Red Lake Dam, located on the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe Indian Reservation, and assumed its operation under the conditions set forth in tribal resolutions passed by the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe. Since completion of the project, the Red Lake Band has expressed concerns regarding the congregation of fish below the dam and the inability of fish to re-enter Red Lake.

The Corps attempted to alleviate this problem by installing a temporary fishway in the 1950s and by reducing the ability of fish to swim out of the lake through the dam by placing stoplogs in front of

the dam gates. However, early fishway technologies were ineffective and reducing downstream fish passage through a dam is difficult at best.

The proposed fishway would be a natural channel design that has recently proven successful in Minnesota and other locations around the world.

A concrete fish trap would be included in the design to prevent common carp from entering the lake by allowing selective transport of desirable species. The fish trap would also facilitate the capture of walleyes for egg stripping in the spring for rearing in a fish hatchery operated by the Red Lake Department of Natural Resources. Construction costs for the project are estimated at about \$700,000.

"In the past few years, the district has worked through many obstacles to move this project forward," Clark said. "Among them were the approval of a construction authority from Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), the planning and design of a unique project and, most recently, obtaining the real estate permit from Bureau of Indian Affairs. Through the process of planning this project, an excellent working relationship has been developed with the Red Lake Band."

A construction company owned by the Red Lake Band, will be completing the work as an 8(a) small business contractor after the district completes the plans and specifications and requests a cost proposal from the contractor.



Photo by John O'Leary

Col. Mike Pfenning, St. Paul District commander, signed a real estate memorandum of understanding with Red Lake Tribal Chairman Floyd Jourdain, Jr., for a fish passage at Red Lake, Minn., March 13. The photo was taken during a tribal council meeting.